

Chapter 1 : Holdings: Luce Irigaray and premodern culture :

This collection is the first sustained examination of Irigaray's crucial relationship to premodern discourses underpinning Western culture, and of the transformative effect she has had on scholars working in pre-Enlightenment periods.

He has written many essays and books on ancient and Renaissance literature and art, including *The Absence of Grace*: He is the editor of *Spenser*: Another volume of essays, *Situated Utterances*: Her publications include *Metamorphoses*: Her work has been translated into several languages. She has published extensively in feminist philosophy, epistemology, poststructuralism, and psychoanalysis. His publications include *Trials of Authorship* , *Hidden Designs: Thomas Nashe and the Scandal of Authorship* He is currently working on a book on the genealogy of Elizabethan romance. Estrin is Professor of English and Department Chair at Stonehill College where she specializes in early modern literature and modern poetry. Her books include *The Raven and the Lark*: She has published numerous articles on Renaissance and contemporary writers. Harvey is the author of *Ventriloquized Voices*: She is Associate Professor of English at the University of Toronto, and is currently completing a book on early modern literature and medicine, *Inscrutable Organs*. Her book, *The Soul as Virgin Wife*: She is more recently the author of *Sensible Ecstasy: Mysticism, Sexual Difference, and the Demands of History* University of Chicago Press, and is now working on a book about meditation, memory, and mourning in late medieval mysticism. *Maternity and Nostalgia, Antiquity to Shakespeare* Cornell, , and essays on ancient and Renaissance poetry. She has edited *Refiguring Chaucer in the Renaissance* Florida, and co-edited a special issue of the annual *Spenser Studies*. She is a former editor of *The Spenser Review*. Grant Williams teaches at Nipissing University, Canada. His own extensive remarks and the wide popularity of this link notwithstanding, we make no claim to resolve its enigmatic nature. We can hardly overstate our gratitude to the contributors to this volume, and to sponsors of conferences in Cambridge and Toronto “ the International Spenser Society and the Renaissance Society of America respectively “ which promoted sessions on Irigaray and premodern writing. Harvey would like to thank Sophie Levy for her skill and flexibility as a research assistant, her colleagues at the University of Toronto for their intellectual generosity, and Theresa Krier for friendship, brilliance, extraordinary patience, and for conceiving this collection. Mellon Fellowship from the Folger Shakespeare Library, all of which made the research and preparation of this volume possible. Her greatest debts are to Anthea and Nicholas, who are always becoming in new ways, and to Mark Cheetham, whose sustaining generosity makes thinking possible. Theresa Krier is grateful to her new colleagues and students at Macalester College, to her family, and especially to Elizabeth D. Harvey, without whose intelligence, wit, drive, professional canniness, and endless reserves of friendship this project would never have come to fruition. Pepper and Bran, the two grandest members of her household, died at the beginning and end of a single winter when we were working hardest on this book. Harvey and Theresa Krier What is realized in my history is not the past definite of what was, since it is no more, or even the present perfect of what has been in what I am, but the future anterior of what I shall have been for what I am in the process of becoming. To suggest that her writings have the capacity to illuminate premodern culture might seem on the face of it to be a counter-intuitive claim because Irigaray does not appear to be overtly interested in the specificities of history. Yet it is precisely her training as a philosopher, linguist, and psychoanalyst that has given her the variety of resources necessary to challenge the fundamental structures that shape our sense of who we are in relation to the present and the past. Her interrogations of language, her critiques of rational and philosophical thought, and her use of the explosive potential of a psychoanalysis turned on the disciplines that subtend our inherited cultural realities allow us to see the past through the lens of a powerfully gendered ethical theory. She scrutinizes the nature of knowledge, our sensory faculties especially the hegemony of the visual , what it means to be embodied, and what the nature of divinity is. She is a subversive philosopher, a term that calls up not only her ability to overthrow or fundamentally disrupt philosophy, but, in its root sense, to turn to its underneath, what it suppresses in order to function. If philosophy, especially metaphysics, employs a language shorn of affect, gender, and historical specificity, as Irigaray charges, her project is to re-embody this neutral discourse, to resituate it within a world attentive to sexual difference and material

origins. The title of her book on Heidegger *The Forgetting of Air in Martin Heidegger* is symptomatic of a tactic that informs her work generally: Her rereading of such philosophers as Plato, Plotinus, Descartes, and Spinoza opens their texts to the historical and cultural contexts in which they were embedded, rendering accessible new ways of understanding pre-Enlightenment culture. Luce Irigaray has been a major figure in Anglo-American literary theory, philosophy, and gender studies ever since her germinal works, *Speculum of the Other Woman* and *This Sex Which Is Not One*, were published in English translation in 1975. Initially controversial, she fascinated and outraged feminists because of her putative biological essentialism, her apparent belief that the essence of woman was located in her bodily nature, and her so-called psychic essentialism, her supposed misreadings of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Subsequent engagements with her evolving thought and prolific writings by such theorists as Judith Butler, Rosi Braidotti, Martin Jay, and Elizabeth Grosz have confirmed her importance as one of the leading feminist theorists of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. While Irigaray is a prominent presence in Anglo-American and European feminist theory, no large-scale appraisal has yet been undertaken that examines either the historical origins of her thought or the transformative effect she has had on scholars working in pre-Enlightenment historical periods. Yet her theories are themselves demonstrably rooted in historical ideas, and she ceaselessly reads, questions, and unpacks the major philosophers from the very earliest to the most recent; she is in fact most engaged with those philosophers who themselves write densely layered palimpsests of earlier thinkers. Her critique of Platonic and Neoplatonic thought, her radical reconception of the body, her theory of mimeticism, her redefinitions of religion and science, her understanding of the exchange of women, and perhaps most importantly, her writing on the relationship between women and language, have profoundly altered the way we think about gender in history. She is a writer analytical, critical, lyrical, riddling at once. No reader familiar with the major contributions, interventions, personae, strategies, and challenges of women writers or characters of early periods throughout Europe is unequipped to read Irigaray, because she employs strategies of reading and methods for challenging dominant discourses that are derived from and reminiscent of premodern tactics. The essays in this collection demonstrate the fruitfulness of her unsettling, provocative writings, for they, like Irigaray herself, work at the intersections of gender, theory, historicism, and language practices in philosophy, poetry, drama, religious writing, science and medicine. In classical, medieval, and early modern studies, historicism continues to be a dominant force, although its centrality is being challenged and augmented by a revitalized psychoanalytic theory, a renewed interest in formalist approaches, the prolific growth of gender and queer theory, and by the methodological variety generated by the productive commerce among and between disciplines. Many recent studies that examine discursive practices in the light of historicism, gender studies, and psychoanalysis evince the potent influence of Foucault and Lacan. Carla Mazzio and David Hillman, *The Body in Parts*, Valeria Finucci and Regina Schwartz, *Desire in the Renaissance: Change*, as we have suggested, is what Irigaray presses toward in all her work on becoming, on metamorphosis, on as yet unimagined forms of gendered relationships and political and communal structures. Words for Irigaray contain a kind of imaginary, a set of cultural associations and a historical past that can be evoked but not regulated. For Irigaray, science means the method of objective inquiry that subtends practices as diverse as physics, linguistics, and psychoanalysis, and her analysis seeks continually to destabilize the certitudes of knowledge on which these sciences rely. Weed Irigaray draws on the epistemological structures of science, converting them to tropes in a move that Elizabeth Weed sees as homeopathic. Weed Irigaray invokes the Copernican revolution in *Speculum*, for example, arguably the fundamental rupture in the history of astronomy and an epistemological crisis that left a powerful imprint on the early modern imagination, in order to fashion an extended conceit about man and his abjuring of matter. Irigaray g: Harvey moves. Elizabeth D. For if we find it relatively easy and rewarding to think of shifted discourse, particularly of the sciences, in the large works of Chaucer, say, or Milton, short poetic forms engage these discourses more elusively. The implications of this cohabitation are theorized obliquely by Irigaray in *To Speak Is Never Neutral*, where she discusses the phantasm and verbs. In the placental relation we can see the materiality of the signifying process layered upon the concepts of conscious and unconscious, and perhaps understand why representations of mothers and the relevance of maternal environments slip

persistently from the view of interpreters of philosophical, poetic, and narrative texts. If absorption or incorporation is her metaphor for transference relations in the analytic context, it also informs her bonds with the philosophers she engages in dialogue. Marine Lover begins with an extended apostrophe to Nietzsche, a philosophical and poetic address that is intensely intimate, as if Irigaray were, or had been, inside Nietzsche: Between you and yourself, I ensure the vocal medium. A perpetual relay between your mouth and your ear. We formed it together. In *Marine Lover*, Irigaray fastens on the twinship of Apollo and Artemis as an image of a unity that contains two singularities, just as her writings on the placenta argue for a union that does not obliterate difference, but rather joins the separate maternal and fetal skins. This formulation echoes the early modern representation of the sense of touch, which is both ubiquitous and lodged in no single place, since tactility is for Irigaray both linked to the mother, as it is for Anzieu, and to the skin, a tactile anchoring that Dionysius is denied because he is not of woman born: For Irigaray, the body is always a historical and metaphorical body, which is not to say that it is not also a physical body, but it is not, as was charged by her first feminist readers, an essentialized body. The habitus "embodied history, internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history" is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product. As such, it is what gives practices their relative autonomy with respect to external determinations of the immediate present. This autonomy is that of the past, enacted and enacting, which, functioning as accumulated capital, produces history on the basis of history, and so ensures the permanence in 10 Elizabeth D. Harvey and Theresa Krier change that makes the individual agent a world with the world. The habitus is a spontaneity without consciousness or will Bourdieu Indeed, the same charges that Irigaray levels against Freud could also be employed to question the predominance of the Galenic model in the early modern period. Thus in *This Sex* she argues, This process of interpretive rereading has always been a psychoanalytic undertaking as well. That is why we need to pay attention to the way the unconscious works in each philosophy, and perhaps philosophy in general. Here, meditating on the essays in this collection, we emphasize how much new creation and generativity emerge from the most negating of readings. Reading is a combination of actions at once social, isolate, explicit, tacit, conscious, preconscious, and unconscious, all in constant mobility. Moreover the liveliness of reading processes involves, paradoxically, both life drives and death drives. Freud also contributes the notions of binding and unbinding, which we use here, in his discussion of the death drive, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Whitford Harvey and Theresa Krier sound suspiciously like telling the same story over and over again. Yet even repetition and the death drive she can revise to make manifest the drive toward life that fuels them: Would repetition compulsion not be that which remains of an insistent leftbehind? Critiquing this impulse in blazon is the aim of the influential array of recent gender scholarship that Williams surveys; we suggest that the blazon gives offense now, as it roused skepticism and concern in major Renaissance poets, precisely because its form devitalizes the very lady for whom it expresses desire. Is this desire a drive toward life or toward death, then? But Williams also shows that the Renaissance blazon allows, and sometimes achieves, a different relation to the desired object. Animality, the body loathe ex-centricity and spatial and temporal dispersion. They continue always to strive toward restoration at some center, which can happen only when an original, or a supplemental, unity, whether it is called return, reappropriation, Future anteriors 13 communion, narcissistic delegation, or jouissance, is projected as an end. Those are some of the other names of the object of desire that will a rouse us as speaking subjects and engaging us in some impossible communication with the other. Turn everything upside down, inside out, back to front. Insist also and deliberately upon those blanks in discourse which recall the places of her exclusion and which, by their silent plasticity, ensure the cohesion, the articulation, the coherent expansion of established forms. Reinscribe them hither and thither as divergencies, otherwise and elsewhere than they are expected, in ellipses and eclipses that deconstruct the logical grid of the reader-writer, drive him out of his mind, trouble his vision to the point of incurable diplopia at least. Overthrow syntax by suspending its eternally teleological order, by snipping the wires, cutting the current, breaking the circuits, switching the connections, by modifying continuity, alternation, frequency, intensity. Make it impossible for a while to predict whence, whither, when, how, why. To read a text is to fold it into a foreign network, to expatriate, dispossess, and disappropriate it. Harvey and Theresa Krier We teach our students protocols of literary or philosophical or critical

interpretation, and rightly so, even when we know that these change over time; tracing the history of interpretive protocols in our various disciplines is one of the core ways of doing a discipline. But we also know that reading has freedoms and surprises outside our protocols: For whoever has entered into articulation, there are no landmarks or road signs indicating a straight pathway, no rest stops along the way that would allow him or her to assume that the development could one day be surveyed, recapitulated, summed up in some unity. The contributors to this volume, all based in specific disciplines, try to listen for the surprises of their texts, paradoxically to listen vigorously "to discern a new future in old, well-known texts, even those texts against which we have railed for their blindnesses. None of these processes of reading is intrinsically irresponsible to history.

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Luce Irigaray has been called a philosopher of change (Whitford), and the essays in this collection demonstrate the metamorphic power of her work in general and its applicability to classical, medieval, and early modern literature and culture in particular.

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